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ABSTRACT

Project Forward, conducted at Cape Cod Community College (Massachusetts) since 1988, provides campus-based, vocational skills instruction along with work-based experience for students with disabilities. Forty-five students aged 18-40 are currently being served by the project. The majority of the students have specific learning disabilities, whereas others have mental retardation, speech impairments, and hearing impairments. Students become involved with Project Forward through transition planning prior to graduating from high school or by referral from other postsecondary programs. The project involves the following activities: students' goals are identified; career interest inventories, vocational assessments, and aptitude and learning style assessments are conducted on an ongoing basis; job-matching and cooperative work experiences are developed by the students and instructors; students, instructors, coordinators, and invited guests receive written reports and participate in individual conferences at the end of each semester; and students graduate at the end of 2 years. Exemplary school-to-work components of the project include skills assessment, cooperative work experience, and partnerships and connecting activities. The project's success rests on these factors: the college setting that gives students opportunities to connect with peers, earn credits, gain work experience, and participate in internships; professional collaboration between educators and employers; and the dedication of the professional project staff. (KC)

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ED 412 351

Project Forward
Cape Cod Community College
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(508) 362-2131 ext. 4481

Mission/Goals

To encourage students with learning disabilities to develop employability skills, improve self esteem, and develop strategies to help them maximize their strengths. The goals of the project are to help students (*a*) build vocational and independent living skills, (*b*) improve communication skills, (*c*) improve self awareness and self advocacy skills, (*d*) relate to others in constructive ways, and (*e*) demonstrate a motivated and responsible attitude towards work.

Organization/Program Context

Project Forward began in 1988 as an innovative collaboration between Riverview School and Cape Cod Community College. Since then, Project Forward has expanded to include students from other towns and high schools in Massachusetts making for a highly diverse student body. Project Forward provides campus-based, vocational skills instruction along with work-based experience for students with learning disabilities.

Description

Students become involved with Project Forward through transition planning prior to graduating from high school or by referral from other post secondary programs seeking a vocational skills training component. They complete an application form and undergo an interview and screening process prior to their acceptance into Project Forward. Once in Project Forward, students progress through a sequence of steps.

1. A student's personal goals and objectives are identified with input from the student and his/her transition team in the high school. These are communicated to Project Forward instructors in the form of an Individualized Education Plan.

2. Career interest inventories, vocational assessments, and aptitude and learning style assessments are conducted on an on going basis. The results may evolve over time as students gain hands-on, concrete, vocational experience both at the college level and at cooperative work sites.

3. Job matching and cooperative work experiences are developed by the students and instructors. Students participate in both campus-based and work-based instruction with individualized support appropriate to their skills, interests, and aptitudes for a two-year or four semester sequence.

4. At the end of each semester students, instructors, coordinators, and invited guests receive written progress reports and participate in individual conferences. Student records and portfolio-based personal assessments are also reviewed and updated at that time.

5. At the end of this two year program students graduate and receive a certificate of completion.

Contact Person

Ms. Beverly Heaton Kimball
Coordinator
(508) 362-2131 ext. 4481

Community Setting

Major town with a seasonal tourist economy. Cape Cod Community College provides post-secondary education and community services to Cape Cod and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Population Served

Forty five students ranging in age from 18 to 40 years with varied disabilities are served by the project. The majority of the students have specific learning disabilities. Other areas of primary diagnosis are mental retardation, speech impairment, and hearing impairment.

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Program Staff

Administrative Staff Associate, College Coordinator
1 part-time
- Coordinates and advocates for the program
- Manages business and administrative aspects

Administrative and Student Advisor, Education Coordinator
1 part-time
- Coordinates curriculum and instruction
- Supervises instructors
- Advises students in career and educational planning
- Acts as liaison

Occupational Assessment Coordinator
1 part-time
- Facilitates student aptitude and career interest assessment
- Facilitates job matching
- Develops competency-based vocational curriculum and educational plans

Work Studies Coordinator
1 part-time
- Develops creative work experience and job placements
- Supervises student performance in the workplace
- Coordinates work-based learning and school-based instruction

Instructor
5 part-time
- Teaches vocational and work/life skills
- Provides instruction based on employer input
- Reinforces work-based expectation and instruction

Assistant Instructor
5 part-time
- Assists teachers
- Provides individualized, direct instruction to students

Exemplary School-to-Work Components

Skills Assessment - School-based Learning
Students go through a skills assessment process which involves the use of several techniques to analyze student performance over time. These include career exploration, vocational assessment, and learning styles assessment. This process, which focuses on abilities, provides opportunities for students to perform tasks similar to those in the workplace, helping to enhance their self-esteem. As a result of the assessment process, the community college staff can provide direct, concrete instruction in specific skill areas and help students transfer these skills into work settings. The direct, concrete instruction enables students to gain an understanding of their individual learning styles, accofnmodations necessary for successful performance on specific jobs, and self-advocacy skills. Employers benefit by receiving trained employees, thus enhancing workplace productivity

Cooperative Work Experience - Work-based Learning
Students gain work experience through job shadowing, job simulation, unpaid internships, and paid cooperative work-study opportunities with local employers. The diversity of work experiences helps students to generalize work-based skills and concepts over time and across different work environments.

Partnerships - Connecting Activities
Critical to the success of the project are the partnerships which develop between students, parents, teachers, human service professionals, and employers as a result of transition planning. For example, the collaboration between Project Forward and the Institute for Community Inclusion /Massachusetts Transition Initiative teaches students self-advocacy and self-determination skills through a series of workshops and professional development sessions. These skills empower students to succeed in school and their career development. In addition, the Supported Employment Affiliates' Employment Network of Barnstable County (SEA), a collaboration of adult service providers, maintains partnerships among educators, agencies, and employers and promotes the employment of persons with disabilities.

What Makes it Work?

Community College Setting
The community college setting gives students opportunities to (*a*) connect with their peers in an adult environment, (*b*) earn credits and participate in general education courses, (*c*) gain valuable employment and independent living skills experience, and (*d*) participate in job shadowing and/or internship work experience.

Professional Collaboration and School-to-Work Linkages
Professional collaboration among educators and employers provides an avenue to draw upon varied strategies, including individualized and direct instruction across various job settings. This collaboration provides students with opportunities to generalize skills and concepts across different work environments.

Professional Staff

Project staff collaborate with general educators, community college faculty members, special educators, vocational educators, and technical educators to provide a dynamic curriculum, innovative teaching strategies, and a supportive team-based atmosphere.

Michael's Story

Michael, a 21 year old man with multiple disabilities, was working towards his high school diploma when he entered Project Forward. Michael was dealing with several key issues including depression and a desire to increase his social network.

In the program, Michael developed a great rapport with the instructor in his institutional maintenance and landscaping course. This course trains students to form work crews and complete work orders and general maintenance tasks in the area of maintenance and landscaping.

Skills assessment revealed that Michael had above average visual, perceptual, and creative abilities that could support his success in Project Forward. This realization and the consistent support and reinforcement from his instructor helped Michael to continually progress in his ability to carry out tasks and work cooperatively with other crew members. Michael's progress helped to enhance his personal competency and self-esteem. His increased self-esteem, along with a new network of friends and his instructor's support, motivated Michael to further improve his reading skills by learning some of the basic words needed to perform maintenance tasks.

Successful experience at Project Forward combined with a supportive staff provided an opportunity for Michael to develop an enhanced future plan for his life. Michael has obtained a paying job in maintenance with a potential for advancement. He now lives independently and has a positive network of peers and friends. After getting his high school diploma, Michael intends to continue his education at Cape Cod Community College.

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His increased self-esteem, along with a new network of friends and his instructor's support, motivated Michael to further improve his reading skills by learning some of the basic words needed to perform maintenance tasks.

For Further Information

School-to-Work Outreach Project
Institute on Community Integration (UAP)
University of Minnesota
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http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/schooltowork/

School-to-work is described in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994.

School to work is . . .

A System built to provide opportunities for students to learn about and experience work while in school.

Educational Reform that addresses the need for students to gain work experience and workplace skills while in school.

Partnerships between schools, employers and communities.

For All Students, kindergarten through 12th grade.

School-to-Work Outreach Project Overview

The School-to-Work Outreach Project at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP) is a nationwide, three year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This project assists and supports school-to-work initiatives through the identification of exemplary school-to-work models/practices/strategies that include students with disabilities. Exemplary school-to-work models/practices/strategies are identified through a five step selection process:

- **Nomination**
- **Application**
- **Reference**
- **Application Review**
- **Final Review and Selection**

Identification Criteria and school-to-work Priority Areas established by the School-to-Work Outreach Project guide the application review.

Profiles of the identified models/practices/strategies are available upon request. Adoption and replication of these exemplary school-to-work activities is encouraged and technical assistance is available to schools and organizations interested in implementing these models/practices/strategies or improving existing school-to-work activities and systems. Contact the School-to-Work Outreach Project at the above address for further information.

Basic Elements of School-to-Work

School-based Learning - Instruction and experiences based on academic and occupational standards.

Work-based Learning - Workplace experience, structured training, mentoring and apprenticeships at job sites.

Connecting Activities - A variety of activities that build and maintain bridges between school, work and other adult environments.

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